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LETTER DATED 8 MARCH 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to forward to you a statement issued today, 8 March 1999, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Haile MENKERIOS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

99-06309 (E) 080399

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Annex

Statement issued on 8 March 1999 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea

Ethiopia continues to pursue its agenda of war

The Ethiopian regime continues to pursue its war of aggression against Eritrea, adamantly rejecting calls by the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the United Nations Security Council, the European Union (EU) and several countries, including the United States of America, the Russian Federation, France, China, Japan and Italy, for an immediate cessation of hostilities.

It may be recalled that, on 1 March, the OAU high-level delegation urged an immediate end to the fighting, given the acceptance by both parties of the Framework Agreement. Similarly, the United Nations Security Council issued two statements in the past week alone calling for an immediate ceasefire and expressing its regret, especially in its communication of 4 March, that Ethiopia still continues its military actions.

But Ethiopia stubbornly persists in its war of aggression, giving a deaf ear to all these calls. Pitched fighting continued throughout last week as Ethiopia launched, almost daily, attacks on the Mereb-Setit front in an attempt to seize Eritrean sovereign territory.

These acts of aggression have been accompanied by belligerent statements from Addis Ababa:

In a government statement of 1 March 1999, entitled "Ethiopia is looking for a lasting peace", the regime openly admits that its agenda extends to overthrowing the Government in Asmara, which has become a threat to the region.

Ethiopia's Parliament issued a vitriolic statement on 2 March rejecting United Nations Security Council resolution 1227 (1999) of 10 February 1999. Ethiopia objected strongly to the cessation of hostilities and the embargo on the sale of arms to both countries. Oddly enough, the extraordinary session of Parliament did not address the Security Council's statement of 27 February calling on both sides to halt hostilities now that the OAU Framework Agreement had been accepted by both parties (S/PRST/1999/9).

A senior government official told a public rally in Addis Ababa on 2 March that the war will continue until the Eritrean army is wiped out.

Ethiopia's speaker of Parliament, Dawit Yohannes, told a press conference in Paris on 3 March that his country is not contemplating a ceasefire at this stage.

As international pressure mounts on Ethiopia, urging it to agree to a ceasefire and not to entertain agendas of territorial aggrandizement or the subversion of a sovereign Government in contravention of international law,

Addis Ababa has come out with a new ploy. In an official statement that it issued on 5 March, Ethiopia is now arguing that it will continue the war until Eritrea withdraws from other occupied territories as required to do so by OAU.

This is a complete lie and a deliberate distortion of the OAU Framework Agreement. Indeed, there is no ambiguity in the OAU Framework concerning demilitarization throughout the border area. The OAU clarification on redeployment and demilitarization given to the Government of Eritrea further reads: the redeployment is of Eritrean troops from Badme town and its environs (defined as the areas surrounding the town). This should be immediately followed by the demilitarization of the entire border, through the redeployment of the forces of both parties along the entire border, to positions to be determined subsequently, as part of the implementation process of the Framework Agreement.

It must also be borne in mind that Ethiopia has always refused to submit the totality of its territorial claims, in spite of the illegal map that it published officially in October 1997 carving out large chunks of Eritrean territory. The Government of Eritrea has time and again requested OAU to demand that Ethiopia submit, in explicit geographic terms, the totality of its claims, as this was imperative for defining the scope of the border conflict. But Ethiopia has invariably rejected these demands. And, in the clarifications that Eritrea sought from OAU regarding this particular issue, the OAU's response reads: "Ethiopia had indicated that it will submit its claims when the issues of delimitation, demarcation and, if need be, arbitration are addressed."

Why is Ethiopia raising new issues now when it has refused to discuss its claims in the past eight months? Does Ethiopia want to revise the Framework Agreement which was endorsed by the summit of the Central Organ of OAU?

Ethiopia has violated operative paragraph 1 of the Framework Agreement on the cessation of hostilities and the relevant Security Council resolutions when it launched the war against Eritrea on 6 February 1999. Despite its pronouncements to the contrary in the early days, Ethiopia does not deny now that this was a well-planned offensive complete with a code name (Operation Sunset).

In the event, is Ethiopia now demanding a "reward" for an act of aggression that it has committed in contravention of OAU and Security Council resolutions? Is this the reason why it is requesting, albeit in a roundabout way, a new version of the OAU Framework Agreement?

Ethiopia goes further, accusing Eritrea of violating human rights and other norms of international law, in an effort to justify continued war. Here again, the track record illustrates the reverse:

It is Ethiopia that has expelled over 53,000 Eritreans and which has confiscated their life-long earnings;

Ethiopia has detained more than 1,500 Eritrean youth as prisoners of war in its concentration camps under the presumption that they are potential soldiers;

Ethiopia has employed about 200 mercenaries in its air force;

Ethiopia continues to target population centres in its air raids (25 civilians have been killed and over 30 wounded in recent air bombings of Deda Lalai, Badme, Adi Qwala, villages in the Zalambesa and Tsorona areas, and Shambuqo).

Ethiopia is not pursuing the war because it has legitimate border claims Ethiopia's agenda is territorial aggrandizement, which it hopes to achieve by installing a puppet government in Eritrea. But this ambition is not tenable in terms of international law. It is also impossible to achieve in practice. It was this ambition that in the past plunged the region into turmoil for 30 years. That sad history should not be repeated now and the onus for preventing a similar disaster lies with the international community.